

World: With 35 United Nations personnel killed in 2011, Staff Union stresses need to take security more seriously, saying one life lost is one too many

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Thirty-five United Nations personnel — 25 civilians, nine peacekeepers and a military adviser — were killed in 2011, according to the Staff Union Committee for the Security and Independence of the International Civil Service. Four security guards working for the Organization were also killed.

In 2010, those killed in malicious attacks included five civilians and 10 peacekeepers, in addition to a number of contractors. In 2009, 31 civilians and seven peacekeepers were killed in attacks directed at the United Nations. “The United Nations staff members have become primary targets of attacks and unfortunately the Organization is not doing enough to protect its personnel,” Staff Union President Barbara Tavora-Jainchill said, emphasizing: “One life lost is one life too many.”

She said the security and safety of United Nations premises and staff had to be taken more seriously, more funds must be made available for that purpose, and decisions regarding staff security should be independent of any economic or political consideration. “The United Nations Staff Union will continue to fight so that the lessons learned from the tragic deaths we suffered in 2011 will move the Organization in the right direction as far as security decisions go,” she emphasized. “Enough is enough.”

The three worst attacks took place in Afghanistan and Nigeria. On 1 April, three staff members were killed in the northern Afghan city of Mazar-e-Sharif after a demonstration against the burning of a copy of the Koran in the United States turned violent and hundreds of people overran the regional office of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). The victims were Joakim Dungal, 33, a human rights officer from Sweden; Filaret Motco, 43, a political officer from Romania; and Lieutenant Colonel Siri Skare, 53, a Norwegian military adviser. In addition, four internationally contracted security guards from Nepal lost their lives while defending the compound — Min Bahadur Thapa, Chhabi Lal Purja Pun, Narayan Bahadur Thapa Magar and Dil Prasad Gurung.

In the Nigerian capital, Abuja, on 26 August, a car bomb struck the United Nations House, which hosts 26 humanitarian and development agencies of the world body, killing 11 staff members. They were Ingrid Midtgaard, 30, a Norwegian associate expert with the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and 10 Nigerians: Rahmat Abdullahi, registry clerk, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); Musa Ali, zonal logistics assistant, World Health Organization (WHO); Johnson Awotunde, monitoring and evaluation specialist, United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF); Edward Dede, national professional officer, WHO; Elisha Enaburekhan, driver, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS); Ahmed Abiodun Adewale Kareem, shipping assistant, UNICEF; Iliya David Musa, receptionist, United Nations Common Services, UNDP; Felicia Nkwuokwu, receptionist, United Nations Common Services, UNDP; Stephen Obamoh, ERT radio operator/driver, UNDP; and Abraham A. Osunsaya, administrative assistant, WHO. A twelfth staff member, Sunday Nwachukwu of UNDP, was severely injured in the attack and died on 9 October. He had been transferred to a hospital in South Africa, where he was on life support. A thirteenth staffer, Fred Simiyu Willis, a UNICEF health specialist from Kenya, died on 23 December in South Africa, where he had been on medical evacuation after the blast.

On 31 October, three Afghan employees of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) — Abdul Shakoor, 57, Nasratallah, 31, and Salah Mohammad, 39 — were killed and two others wounded when suicide bombers and gunmen attacked a compound in an organized assault in Kandahar, southern Afghanistan.

The Staff Union also detailed the following attacks:

— John James Okwath, a 26-year-old UNHCR driver, was struck in the chest on 4 February by a bullet during fighting

between army elements in the Malakal area of South Sudan, and died later in hospital.

— Zahra Abidi, 33, of Sweden, a United Nations Volunteer (UNV) working as an information analyst with the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), died on 31 March after being struck by a stray bullet that entered through a window of her home in a fifth-floor apartment in Abidjan, the city that had been the scene of fighting between forces loyal to Laurent Gbagbo and those supporting Alassane Ouattara.

— Isatu Agnes Bangura, a police officer from Sierra Leone serving with the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), was killed on 5 April after having been abducted in Northern Darfur State. A group of armed men ambushed a mission patrol returning from the town of Fata Borno. The peacekeepers returned fire, killing one of the attackers, but the remaining attackers managed to hijack a vehicle carrying three peacekeepers. They later released two of them, who sustained injuries, but Ms. Bangura was found to have been killed.

— Santino Pigga Alex Wani, of South Sudan, a senior programme assistant working with the World Food Programme (WFP), was killed on 22 April during an attack by armed assailants near Duk Payuel in Duk County of Jonglei State in South Sudan. He was on mission with members of WFP's cooperating partner, Joint Aid Management, when the vehicle in which they were travelling came under attack.

— Farhan Hamsa, a WFP driver, was killed on 13 May in an ambush by unknown assailants in the Somali Region of Ethiopia. He was on a monitoring mission with three colleagues when the vehicles in which they were travelling were attacked. Another staff member was injured in the attack, and two others were kidnapped and subsequently released on 30 June.

— Four Ethiopian "blue helmets" with the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) — Lance Corporal Abreham Asele, Private Lechisa Desalasa, Private Abebe Kebena and Corporal Tesfaye Negasa — were killed on 2 August and seven others injured after a landmine detonated while they were on patrol in Mabok, south-east of Abyei. Three of the victims initially injured subsequently died.

— Corporal Gibriel Sheku Mansaray, a UNAMID peacekeeper from Sierra Leone, was killed on 5 August and another blue helmet wounded after unidentified gunmen ambushed a vehicle carrying five UNAMID troops in the village of Duma, north-east of Nyala, capital of South Darfur State.

— Two UNAMID peacekeepers — John Twahirawa, 37, and Samuel Ntakirutimana, 28, from Rwanda, and Mamadou Touré, 59, a Senegalese UNAMID police adviser — were killed on 10 October, when their night patrol was ambushed by a group of unidentified armed men in Zam Zam, a camp for internally displaced persons on the outskirts of El Fasher, capital of North Darfur State. Five other peacekeepers were injured.

— UNAMID peacekeeper Lance Corporal Ahmed Thomas was killed and two other Sierra Leonean blue helmets wounded when gunmen attacked a patrol on 6 November near Nyala, capital of South Darfur. In total, six peacekeepers lost their lives in four separate incidents in Darfur during the year.

— Muhyedin Yarrow, 54, and Mohamed Salad, 28, of WFP, as well as an employee of the non-governmental organization Doyale, were killed by a gunman on 23 December in Somalia. The attack took place in Mataban town in the central Hiran region, where the two staff members were on a mission to monitor the distribution of food aid.

In addition, peacekeepers with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) were wounded in three roadside bomb attacks in southern Lebanon, six on 27 May, six on 26 July and five on 9 December. UNOCI peacekeepers were also wounded in separate incidents — three on 12 January, one on 26 February and six on 2 April — and four of their UNAMID counterparts were wounded in West Darfur in two incidents — two on 22 March and two on 22 July. Two personnel of the United Nations Mission in the Sudan (UNMIS) were wounded when their compound in Abyei was shelled on 21 May.

Kidnappings of United Nations personnel also continued in 2011. Three Bulgarian members of a helicopter crew working for the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) were kidnapped on 13 January by armed men at a landing strip in Um Shalaya, 60 kilometres (37 miles) south-east of Geneina, capital of West Darfur State. They were freed on 6 June after nearly five months in captivity.

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